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An Offering of Thanks.

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3T was Aunt Eunice who first proposed it. She sat by the parsonage window one wintry morning, with her lap full of stockings in assorted sizes, and a basket heaped with miscellaneous garments by her side. She had just dropped in, after her neighbourly fashion, to help the minister's wife with the mending, so that the over-taxed woman herself might find time to attend to the sewing

society, and the needle-work guild, and the children's aid, and the score or so of organizations in which she was expected to take the lead. Just now it was a thank-offering service, and her perplexity was written in little cuneiform inscriptions on her forehead and about her eyes, as she read a note that had just come in.

"Here's another woman who cannot possibly serve on the committee of arrangements," she commented. "I declare, I am completely discouraged over that thank-offering meeting. Everybody is busy with home affairs and not willing to do a thing, and unless we can get up something very attractive nobody will come. The worst of it is that it isn't a thank-offering when you do get it; many of them look upon it simply as an extra tax that they pay because they cannot respectably avoid it—"

Mrs. Boynton checked herself with a sudden recollection that her remarks, however just, were hardly judicious in a woman who was expected to be superior to human weakness.

"If you could manage in some way to divide it," said her listener gently.

"Divide it? I don't understand."

"Why, the thank-offering. Get the thanks first, and the offering would come of itself; the thanks would be an offering, you know."

"You dear woman," exclaimed the minister's wife, her face brightening in a way that smoothed out the small wrinkles. "I'll do that very thing. How fortunate that the last member of my committee has failed, and left me to do

precisely as I choose. We will have a meeting to offer thanks, and see what will come of it."

"But you know, child, we never do see all that comes of thanks-giving, any more than we see all that comes of the rain and the sunshine. We see it brightens up the flowers and the leaves, but we don't think of what is going on down among the roots, and how a good deal that seems to be lost may be doing the best work."

"I know, Aunt Eunice, and I'll try to remember, and now for my typewriter; if there's any temporal gift I ought to give thanks for I'm sure it's that."

It was at the summons of the typewriter that so large a number of women were gathered on Sunday afternoon in the parlours of the parsonage. A little envelope bearing the motto, "O, come, let us give thanks unto the Lord!" had gone to each woman in the church and congregation, with the request that she would write upon a slip of paper some special reason for thanksgiving, enclose it without signature in the envelope, and bring it with her to the meeting. Not every woman had complied with her request, but the great proportion had done so, and the pretty rose-bowl on the stand by the door was well filled with the little mute offerings before the minister's wife took it from its place and set it by the open Bible before her.

"I declare, it begins to seem real solemn," whispered Mrs. Garrett. "Mrs. Boynton's great for getting up things. Did you bring your pocketbook?"

"Why, no; do you s'pose it's anything about money?" asked her neighbour in some alarm.

"You never can tell; I left mine at home to be safe. Do you see Mrs. Catlin over in the corner? I don't s'pose she's been out before since Dorothy died. I shouldn't think even Mrs. Boynton would have dared to send her an envelope. I call it real heartless, though they say she's awful bitter and rebellious. Poor thing, I don't know as I blame her."

But when, after an inspiring hymn, a psalm of thanksgiving and a fervent prayer from Aunt Eunice, Mrs. Boynton drew the crystal bowl nearer to her, even Mrs. Garrett felt a little thrill of awe.

"Dear friends," said the minister's wife, "this offering seems to me a very sacred and precious thing. It comes directly from our hearts to God. It is a gift to Him alone, and one that only He can measure. I feel as if this were one of the 'golden vials full of odours which are the prayers of the saints,' an offering to be laid silently down at His feet, and I almost hesitate to repeat aloud what your hearts have said to Him. Let us try to feel that we are saying it to Him, and not to each other."

Then in a tender, sympathetic voice she began to read the little sealed-up messages: "For an answered prayer," "For deliverance from a great anxiety," "For an unexpected blessing," "For a year of unbroken health," "For strength in sore temptation," "For a closer acquaintance

with my Father," "For the love that refused my heart's desire but gave me a better portion."

As she read on, with now and then a word of comment, the room grew so still you could almost hear the throb of the many listening hearts, until at last she opened an envelope, and hesitated just an instant before she read, "He hath led me and brought me into darkness, but not into light—He hath made me desolate."

There was a quiver in her own voice as she ended, and one sympathetic little woman caught her breath with an audible sob, but no one dared look toward the rigid figure with pallid face showing faintly through the long shrouding veil. Mrs. Boynton did not even lift her eyes, but presently she repeated softly a verse from Margaret Preston's "Litany of Pain":

"Sometimes, when my pulses are throbbing
With currents whose feverish flow
Sets all the strong spirit to sobbing
With speechless yet passionate woe,
I inwardly question and falter,
Though lips are too still to complain,—
What profit to lay on God's altar
Oblations of pain?"

"Can one be thankful for sorrow?" she went on; "Does our Father expect us to thank Him for the awful bereavements of our lives? He knoweth our frame—He

remembereth that we are dust—He knows we cannot understand, and He only bids us trust His love and wisdom, and wait till He makes things clear to us. Perhaps it will never be in this world, and we shall go to Him as perplexed and sorry as ever, and He will take us in His arms and tell us all about it. But while we are waiting we have some things to comfort us, and let us try to think of those. When my heart aches for my dear little daughter, I am glad that I had her and could rejoice in her. I'm glad I could hold her to my heart as something precious, and not with a sense of shame and fear lest this unwelcome gift should be hurried out of the world that had no place for her. I'm glad of all the years that were made happy by my dreams and hopes and anticipations for her, and that I never had to look forward to a life of cruel, loveless servitude for her. I am glad that in her sickness she was tenderly cared for, and all that love and skill could devise was done for her, instead of being left to suffer unaided, and that when she died her precious dust was laid lovingly away among fragrant flowers, not cast out as a polluted thing by the road-side. I am glad that I had been taught to know that this dear body was not my child, but the shrine of a deathless soul that had gone to live with its heavenly kindred, and whose blessed presence may even now be near me as a pitying angel, not a malicious fiend that must be driven away from the home. And I am glad, oh! unspeakably glad, that I know both she and I are in the hands of a loving Father, not an angry tyrant, and that our separation is but for a little while, and will all be forgotten

in the glory that is to follow. When I remember that all these possibilities of consolation have come to me only through the revelation of God in Christ, my heart aches for those who do not so know Him, and I do give thanks in all things, if I cannot say for all things."

No one wanted to speak, and presently Kitty Alden began to play and sing :

" My Jesus, as Thou wilt,
All shall be well with me."

Before she finished, Mrs. Caltin went out without speaking to anyone, and the rest drew a breath of relief, as if a weight had been lifted.

" But I never thought," said Mrs. Garrett, " how much there was to be thankful for about the very worst things that happen to us, though I don't know as it makes 'em any easier to bear. I just wonder what Mrs. Catlin thought."

Mrs. Boynton wondered also, and it was with a good deal of trepidation that she opened a note which came next day bordered with the deepest black.

" Dear Mrs. Boynton," it read, " I cannot yet take your comfort to my heart, but it has helped me a little, and I want to make my offering to the other mothers whom no one comforts. Will you send it to them for me ?"

" It's a hundred dollars, Aunt Eunice," said Mrs. Boynton, " and there's our thank-offering all in a lump."

"It's a blessed thing for Mrs. Catlin," said Aunt Eunice, "but the best thing for the church would have been for a hundred women to give it."

"But if they really gave thanks—"

"Yes; we'll hope they all did; the Lord knows."

"And you said yourself we never could see all that comes of thanksgiving."—*Missionary Friend.*